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ABSTRACT

This methodological study investigated which fertility values are correlated with the variable of desired family size. Data was gathered from 310 Caucasian Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish women from the Buffalo metropolitan area. The subjects were between the ages of 15 and 44, lived with their husbands, and had either none, one, two, or four children. The survey instrument employed two main methods of eliciting responses: a series of openended questions and a card sort task which indicated opinions on a pre-established list of potential fertility values. Results presented in data tables and figures show: (1) the fertility values most mentioned by the respondents, (2) most important fertility values from the card sort tasks, (3) fertility values correlating with desired family size, and (4) feeling about various family sizes among respondents desiring two children. The results are discussed in terms of the patterns of the correlations, the importance of personal benefits of husbands and wives in determining family size, the absence of motivators for large families, the relation of reward values to family size, and the religious differences reflected in the correlates of actual desired family size. (SDH)

Fertility Values: Why People Stop Having Children*

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Introduction

If people's family size desires are at all rational, larger families must in some respects seem more rewarding to those who want large families, and smaller families must in some respects seem more rewarding to those desiring small families. The criteria by which people evaluate family sizes as more and less rewarding (costly) are what we call fertility values. To be a fertility value for a person, we say that a value must be considered important by that person and he must perceive the value's attainment as affected by family size in some way. While not a necessity by this definition, it is possible that the more significant a certain fertility value is to a person in the dual aspects, the more that individual would be inclined to prefer a small or large family. Consider financial costs, which can be a fertility value by our definition. Probably most people perceive that expenses become greater as family size increases. This perception could give rise to a negative correlation between the degree to which expenses are held as a fertility value and desired family size. The objective of the investigation reported here was to determine, for a sample of married women of child-bearing age, which fertility values are in fact correlated with desired family size. The results would thus suggest some of the origins of desired family size.

This interest in tracing the roots of family size desires stems from the fact that one of the established relationships in the study of human fertility is that to a fair degree desired family size predicts completed family size, therefore it may be assumed that desires are a significant determinant of human fertility. We really know very little about where those desires originate, however, although some research attention has been given to procreative interests as originating in conformity to social norms and as

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manifestations of fundamental personality dimensions. Little attention has been given to the processes by which people evaluate alternative family sizes as a possible way by which they arrive at their preferred family size. This problem is the focus of a larger research program of which the investigation reported here is one part.

The Survey Sample

For this primarily methodological study, a sample of 310 married Caucasian women from the Buffalo metropolitan area were interviewed. All respondents were living with their husbands and were 15 to 44 years of age, the standardly used range of fecundity. Quota sampling methods were used to obtain approximately equal numbers of Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, as well as equal numbers of respondents with 0, 1, 2, or 4 children. Most of the sampling criteria were dictated by the broader purposes of the study.

Procedure

Desired family size, the variable the study seeks to explain, was measured by a version of the standard question used frequently in fertility surveys. The respondent was asked how many children she wanted when her family was completed, provided that their spacing and the number of boys and girls were just right, and they could be either adopted or born to the respondent.

Two main methods were used in the survey instrument to elicit the fertility values of the respondents. The first was a series of open-ended questions, asking for the respondent's likes and dislikes about having 0, 1, 3, or 6 children. It was felt that this wide range would be sufficient to tap the various evaluative concerns a respondent may have. The open-ended method of course permits the discovery of the respondent's fertility values relatively free of the researcher's preconceptions of what they might be. A content analysis scheme was developed for coding the responses into various categories of fertility values. (Intercoder reliability averaged 80%.)

The second method more directly measured the importance of fertility values by using respondent judgments on a pre-established list of potential fertility values, each of which was written on a card. Examples were:

"Having well-adjusted, normal children"

"Avoiding confusion and mess in my home"

"How hard I must work as a mother"

Each respondent was first required to sort the cards into five piles ranging from "Not important" to "Extremely important". Next, the respondent sorted the cards again, to answer the question, "How much difference would the number of my children make?" (to each value). The response categories ranged from "No difference" to "Very big difference". By assigning a score from 0 to 4 to the response categories for each sort, the product of the two scores for each value was then used to indicate its importance as a fertility value in accord with the definition given earlier.

At one point in the interviews, the respondents were asked simply to explain their choice of family size. Many respondents had difficulty in answering this question, and generally the answers were sparse. None of these data are presented here.

Results

In their expressions of likes/dislikes of family size, nearly every respondent brought up aspects of both her own welfare and that of her children, with considerably fewer mentions of general family welfare or society's welfare. Table 1 presents the fertility values mentioned by the most respondents.

Indications of the most important fertility values from the card sort tasks overlap but are somewhat different from the above list. The top ten fertility values and their product scores were as shown in Table 2.

In a few instances the two "top ten" lists do not correspond because respondents brought up topics that were not on the cards; this is true of companionship for each child and spoiling. On the other hand, some topics on cards received very high ratings although seldom mentioned by the respondents; this was the case for how hard the husband must work, attention between the husband and wife, and privacy for the family members. There are common themes in the various mentions of financial considerations and in the attention between family members, especially that of the parents to children.

One advantage of the data from the card sorts is that factor analysis may be used to reveal the dimensional structure of the responses. Table 3 presents the two factors that accounted for the most variance, and it can be seen that the first factor is by far the larger. The variables that comprise this factor are a veritable catalog of what are commonly regarded as the rewards of having children, aptly labeled by the variable loading most highly. The second factor clearly pertains to family finances and associated matters like housing and education. These then are the major dimensions by which our respondents seemed to consider family size. (Other minor factors centered around activities outside the home, overpopulation, sibling benefits, attention among family members, and self-esteem. None of these accounted for more than 4.5 per cent of the total variance.)

It is premature to conclude that those fertility values identified actually determine choice of family size, which is a central problem of this investigation. This was examined in the open-end questions by comparing the frequency of mention of different fertility values by those who desired two, three, or four children. (They comprised 91% of all the respondents.) While

there were some systematic differences according to desired family size, none were statistically significant with the small subsamples. Tendencies indicated that many more fertility values might be correlated with desired family size for the Protestants than for the Catholics or Jews. Also apparent was that of the several fertility values that did seem related to desired family size, only concerns with parental freedoms and providing materially for the children had appeared among the ten most frequently mentioned.

Results from the card sorts were more promising in that they produced many statistically significant relationships with desired family size. Table 4 lists only those fertility values whose correlations with desired family size were at least $|.30|$. (They are significant at the .01 level or better.)

The correlations, while modest in size by some standards, are fairly substantial considering that (a) the correlations are with desired family size, a variable concentrated mainly within the values 2, 3 and 4; and (b) no single fertility value would reasonably be expected to be the primary determinant of desired family size.

Some striking patterns of the correlations list are apparent. (These patterns are basically the same that appear in the longer list of all the variables that correlate at .05 or better.)

(1) As with the results for the open-ended questions, there are distinct religious differences in the number and kind of variables that correlate with desired family size.

(2) Of all the variables listed above, only two (better life for children, children's education) are distinctively children's welfare, and these correlate substantially only for the Protestants. Thus, although children's welfare is stressed by the respondents in answering the open-ended questions and in the card sorts, those concerns do not actually correlate much with choice of family size.

(3) All the correlations are negative, indicating that the significant fertility values are those that tend to deter people from having larger families. This is especially interesting, since the main factor emerging in the factor analysis included numerous rewards of having children, none of which correlated substantially with desired family size.

(4) Two fertility values correlate substantially with desired family size across two of the three religions. One is "privacy for family members" (rarely brought up in answering the open ended questions), the other is "freedom of parents for outside activities". Notably absent from the list are the two fertility values that are given prominence in the open-ended questions and the card sorts, general economic concerns and parental attention to the children.

How well do the various fertility values together explain desired family size? This question was examined by multiple regression analyses for each of the religious groups. All fertility values correlating at least .200 ($P \leq .05$) were included. The multiple R's were .62 for the Protestants, .53 for the Catholics, and .45 for the Jews. For the Protestants and Catholics at least, the multiple correlations made substantial improvements over the correlations for individual fertility values.

Discussions and Conclusions

Were we to construct the reasoning for choice of family size from the respondents' numerous concerns as voiced in answering the open-ended questions, we would come up with quite a different rationale than we would if we examined the correlates of desired family size. From the former we might infer that choice of family size is strongly influenced by what is best for the children, but that appears actually to be only a minor determinant of desired family size. Family expenses also appear to be less important to family size preferences than might be inferred from past fertility surveys. What does seem to determine family sizes desires is complex, but personal benefits to the husband and wife do seem to be central. It is likely that these differences between professed values and actual correlates of desired family size are due to a tendency to express that which appears socially acceptable and legitimate, and to suppress those concerns which may seem selfish or unreasonable.

Curiously, our investigation has failed to unearth motivators for larger families, since we have not found positive correlates of desired family size. We are tempted to suggest that perhaps that is because Mother Nature has so structured reproductive processes that motivation is needed not to have children, only to stop having them!

Further investigation may reveal more on the relation of reward values to family size. For now we may consider clues provided by a preliminary examination of a rating scale method for assessing satisfactions with family size. Figure 1 portrays how satisfied a group of respondents expected they would feel about various values if they had family sizes up to six children. The four values that might be considered costs of children appear as increasing sources of dissatisfaction as family size becomes larger. In contrast, the two reward-type values vary only slightly with family size. Although Figure 1 portrays the feelings only for respondents desiring two children, similar tendencies were obtained for those desiring three or four children. These results suggest the possibility that people are deterred from having additional children because they anticipate an increase in the costs but not the rewards of a family. This reinforces the idea suggested by the correlational analysis, viz. that the costs of children rather than the rewards are the main determinant of desired family size.

Caution is needed, however, in drawing inferences from the limited data of what is intended basically as a methodological study. Particularly important is the fact that we haven't yet investigated curvilinear relationships, either in the way people perceive family size effects, nor in correlations of desired family size. An example of how such relationships may be important is in the fertility value "companionship for each child," which received prominent mention by the respondents. It may be hypothesized that the benefits of companionship would be seen to increase with family size up to a point, after which the excessive companionship in large families might be considered detrimental to the children.

Regarding the religious differences, relative uniformity seems to exist in the professed fertility values, but not with respect to the actual correlates of desired family size. This again suggests the existence of a cultural overlay about what is legitimate or acceptable to say about family size, but actual religious differences are more pronounced than this overlay would make it seem. As to why there should be relatively fewer correlates of desired family size among Catholics and Jews is difficult to say, but this topic also invites further research.

Table 1

FERTILITY VALUES MOST FREQUENTLY MENTIONED
(by per cent of respondents mentioning)

General economic concerns	72%	Materially providing for the children	47%
Companionship for each child	70%	Parental freedoms	47%
Attention for each child	64%	Parental emotional satisfactions	45%
Spoiling of the child	57%	Harmony/conflict among the children	41%
Social benefits of siblings	49%	Work required of mother	41%

Table 2

FERTILITY VALUES RECEIVING THE HIGHEST PRODUCT SCORES
(Personal importance x Perceived family size influence)

	<u>Ave.</u>		<u>Ave.</u>
Attention for each child	9.5	Parental mental strain	8.4
Attention between husband and wife	9.0	Obtaining housing	7.9
Education for the children	8.7	Everyday expenses	7.9
Materially providing for the children	8.7	Privacy for the family members	7.7
How hard husband works	8.5	Overpopulation	7.3

Table 3

THE MAJOR FACTORS OF FAMILY SIZE EVALUATION--CARD SORT DATA

Factor I (29.7% total variance)		Factor II (9.8% total variance)	
	<u>Loading</u>		<u>Loading</u>
Satisfaction in watching children grow up	.83	Everyday family expenses	.81
Satisfaction in seeing children's talents & abilities develop	.80	Money for children's needs	.71
Pride in children's accomplishments	.79	Obtaining adequate housing	.71
Pleasure of loving & being loved by one's children	.79	Costs of children's education	.71
My children's health	.75	Ability to buy things wanted	.69
Having children's respect	.72	Crowding in home	.59
Having well-adjusted children	.62	How hard husband must work	.52
Passing on beliefs to next generation	.61	Giving children chance for better life	.50
Having fun as a family	.60		
Having warm, close relationships with my children	.57		
Husband fulfilling himself	.56		
Doing God's will	.55		
Doing what is moral & right	.54		
Importance of family in community	.53		
Approval of family by community	.52		

Table 4

FERTILITY VALUES CORRELATING WITH DESIRED FAMILY SIZE

With r at Least |.30|

(P < .01)

Protestants (n=99)		Catholics (n=100)		Jews (n=95)	
Privacy for family members	-.43	Privacy for family members	-.32	Attention between husband & wife	-.36
Overpopulation	-.40			Husband & wife getting along	-.34
Better life for children	-.34			Outside activities	-.32
Outside activities	-.33				
Adequate housing	-.32				
Mental strain	-.32				
Children's educa- tion	-.32				

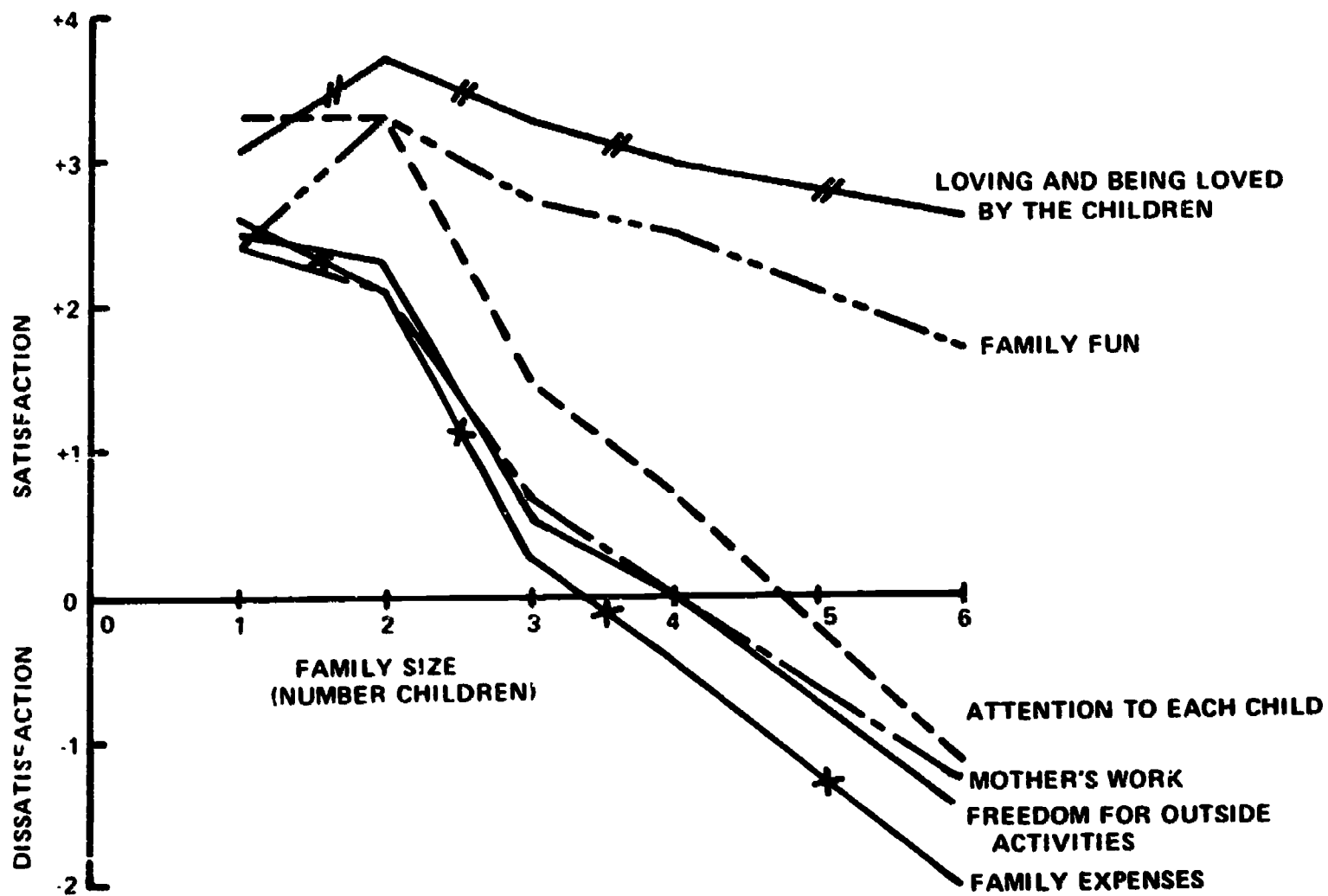


Figure 1 FEELINGS ABOUT VARIOUS FAMILY SIZES AMONG RESPONDENTS DESIRING TWO CHILDREN (n = 137)